

HARRY

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By Alpa Pratalia

Harry had fourteen ways to kill himself, neatly categorized in a battered notebook. Some were practical—quick and effective. Others were elaborate, bordering on the theatrical. One involved a fireworks display synchronized to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, purely for the amusement of whoever found the body.

He never went through with any of them. Not out of hope, not out of fear—just sheer, soul-crushing apathy. It was exhausting, after all, to plan anything, even your own demise.

So instead, he drank.

The morning began, as all his mornings did, with the taste of last night's whiskey on his tongue and the distinct feeling that the world had outstayed its welcome. He sat in his single-room apartment, a place that had once had potential but now smelled of old cigarettes, spilled liquor, and resignation. The blinds were drawn. The answering machine blinked with messages he'd never check. The fridge

contained nothing but half a bottle of gin and a carton of eggs he hadn't touched in months.

He scratched his unshaven face and groaned. His head throbbed in protest, a dull ache behind his eyes, as if his own body was tired of housing him.

There was no job to go to. There hadn't been for years. The last one—something involving spreadsheets and a boss named Gary who used words like *synergy* unironically—had ended in a spectacular blaze of burnt bridges and a termination letter that still sat, unread, under a pile of unpaid bills.

His only real hobby these days, besides drinking, was thinking up increasingly petty lawsuits he'd never file. He liked to fantasize about dragging his parents to court for the crime of bringing him into this world without his consent. His opening statement was airtight:

"Your Honor, I present Exhibit A: Life. A grotesque, unfair, and deeply inconvenient burden forced upon me against my will. I demand reparations, back pay for every miserable second endured since birth, plus damages for emotional distress."

He imagined the judge nodding solemnly, the jury gasping in horrified agreement. But then, inevitably, reality intruded, and he was left with nothing but his own bitter thoughts and another shot of whiskey.

Outside, the world droned on, oblivious.

Another day. Another disappointment.

Into the valley of Death
Rode Harry.

Pain guides me
along the forgotten paths
for nothing's sake.

When I walk
through the darkest valley,

I will fear everything,
for nothing is with me.

Cannon to right of him,
Cannon to left of him,
Cannon in front of him,
 Volleyed and thundered.

Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell,
 Rode Harry.

And no one watched.
And no one cared.
And nothing changed.

Harry didn't need a reason—he had millions.
Didn't need a place—anywhere would work.
Didn't need motivation—he was born for it.

What he needed was something far harder:
To go past his laziness,
To bother enough to go through with it.

It wasn't despair that held him back,
Not fear, nor doubt, nor second thoughts.
Just the sheer weight of effort—
The unbearable task of ending it all.

He had the plans, the means, the time.
But even suicide required a push,
And Harry had long since stopped pushing anything
at all.

For all the ways life had mistreated him, Harry had
developed a punishment of *contrapasso* against it:
he did everything he could to help others through
life. If existence had been cruel to him, he would
answer with undeserved kindness—not because he
believed in goodness, but because it was the most
spiteful way to retaliate.

He held the hands of those life had battered the
worst. When someone was on the edge, he was the
one who sat beside them, wordless, until the abyss
didn't seem quite as endless. He helped up those
who life had reduced to nothing—offering a

cigarette, a meal, or just the acknowledgment that they still existed.

And he never judged those who had enough of this shit and wanted out. He understood better than anyone. He had spent years drafting his own escape plans, perfecting them like an artist honing a masterpiece. If someone was ready to leave, he didn't try to talk them out of it. Instead, he gave them a choice—because that was the one thing life never gave anyone.

Maybe it was a twisted kind of morality, or maybe it was just his way of making life feel smaller, less powerful. Either way, it was the only thing keeping him here.

Whenever someone asked him:

"Do you remember me?" – *No.*

"Do you remember that...?" – *No.*

"Do you remember when...?" – *No.*

"Did you remember to...?" – *No.*

His answer was always the same:

"I drink. What's your excuse?"

It shut people up. They either laughed awkwardly or left him alone, both of which suited him fine. If they pressed, if they dared to ask why he drank so much, he'd shrug and say, *"Because the alternative is remembering."*

Memories were like debt—best ignored until they became someone else's problem.

Every day, Harry woke up and thought:

"Shit, I didn't die this night either."

It wasn't disappointment, exactly. Just another dull fact, like the weather or the price of cigarettes. He checked his pulse out of habit, not hope. Still there. Still ticking.

Another day to get through. Another set of hours to fill with drinking, forgetting, and waiting.

Harry tried his best to be the **polite drunk**, the **inoffensive vagabond**, because the last thing he wanted was to be **bothered**—and he extended the same courtesy to the rest of the world.

He wasn't the kind of drunk who started fights, shouted nonsense at strangers, or pissed on the sidewalk just to make a point. He kept to himself, drank quietly, and, when necessary, nodded at people in a way that suggested civility but discouraged conversation.

If he passed out on a park bench, he made sure it was in a way that wouldn't offend anyone's sensibilities. If he stumbled out of a bar, he did it with as much dignity as a man in his state could manage. And if someone asked him for help, he gave it—because nothing made people go away faster than getting what they wanted.

The world had done him the great courtesy of not caring whether he lived or died. He intended to return the favor.

But he wanted to be dead. With all his might.

Or better—he wanted to have never been.

Death was just an exit; what he craved was a return.
A rewind past the first breath, past the first cry, past
the first miserable second of consciousness.

He envied the rocks, the dust, the spaces between
stars—things that had never been burdened with
existence. Life was the problem. Life was the
disease. And since life meant existing, the only
logical solution was to get rid of it and go back to
before his birth—before his first memory, before his
first thought, before the universe had the audacity
to make him real.

Wonderful, perfect nothingness.

That's all he wanted. But he was still here. And
every morning, his first thought reminded him of
that simple, infuriating fact:

"Shit. I didn't die this night either."

Stupidity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome.

So, for the idiot he was, Harry kept falling for **love**, for **hope**, for **opportunities**—as if this time, maybe, just maybe, it would be different.

It never was.

Every time, he gathered another scar. Then another. Then another. Hope was a knife with a familiar grip, and he always found a new way to drive it into himself.

Every betrayal, every disappointment, every letdown stacked on top of the last until he was more scar tissue than man.

And every time, as he sat in the wreckage of his latest mistake, nursing another wound, he asked himself the same question:

"How stupid can a person be?"

And every time, he found a new way to answer it.

In his midlife, Harry was a **battered mind in a battered body**, both broken in too many places to count, both hurting with every attempt to function.

But his mind hurt the most.

Bones ached, joints protested, his liver screamed for mercy—but none of it compared to the weight inside his skull. The memories that wouldn't fade, the regrets that sharpened with time, the relentless, gnawing awareness that this was it. That there was no meaning, no resolution, no final act that would make sense of it all. Just more days, more drinking, more waiting.

His body was wreckage, sure. But his mind? That was a **prison on fire**.

And every morning, every damn morning, he woke up inside it.

A hell to be alive.

When pain hit him—physical, mental, or whatever mix of the two the day decided to serve up—it never came as a surprise anymore.

It was an **old acquaintance**, an expected visitor. The kind you don't even bother to greet properly, just a tired "**Oh, hello. You again.**"

Eskimos had dozens of words for **snow**; Harry had just as many for **pain**.

There was the deep **bone-throbbler**, the one that lived in his joints and settled in for the winter.

The **knife-twist**, sharp and sudden, like a betrayal you should've seen coming but didn't.

The **dull hum**, the one in his head that never really went away, just changed volume.

The **gut-sinker**, the realization that nothing would ever really change.

The **ghost ache**, the pains of things long gone—people, places, possibilities.

And, of course, the **existence drag**—the slow, grinding exhaustion of simply continuing.

Each had its own presence, its own weight, its own bitter familiarity.

And just like the **regulars at his bar**, they all kept coming back.

Last night, Harry and I were both full of piss and vinegar.

Drunk, loud, reckless—the usual. The kind of night where nothing mattered except the next drink and the next bitter joke about how everything was a joke. He was in rare form, slurring philosophy between gulps, cursing existence with the kind of conviction only he could manage.

Now, I've woken up, head pounding, mouth dry as a grave, and Harry is nowhere to be found.

Not in his usual spot on the couch. Not in the bathroom, where he sometimes passed out. Not even in the kitchen, where he'd sit and chain-smoke

in the dark like some tragic poet no one would ever write about.

And I'm fearing the worst.

Because Harry didn't just drink to forget—he drank to prepare. And last night, he had that look. The one that said he was **tired of waiting**.

I don't want to check his notebook.

I don't want to find his last plan crossed out.

I don't want to be right.

But I know him.

And Harry always said, **"One day, I won't wake up. And for once, I'll finally be right about something."**

A gallon of water, a pint of aspirins, and a long, scalding shower—just enough to scrape last night off me. I'm like new. Or as new as I ever get.

But Harry?

I don't want to look for him. **He'd hate me for that.**

Harry never wanted rescuing. Never wanted a speech, a helping hand, or some sentimental idiot trying to pull him back. If he's gone, it's because he meant to be. And the worst thing I could do is disrespect that.

So I stay here.

I sit in the same spot we drank in last night, light a cigarette, pour a drink I don't want, and wait.

Maybe he'll come back, cursing and laughing, dragging his sorry ass through the door like always. Maybe he'll call me a fool for worrying. Maybe we'll do it all over again.

And if he doesn't...

I know he'll finally be in no pain anymore.

And for Harry, that's the closest thing to peace there ever was.

Shit. Now I'm beginning to be **Harry** in **Harry's absence**.

That drink I said I didn't want? **I wanted three. Had five.**

And they didn't cure a damn thing.

Didn't take the edge off. Didn't silence the thoughts. Just made the room tilt slightly, made my hands a little slower, made the minutes slip past without meaning.

And yet—something's still there.

What is that?

Why do I feel as if I've got a **fishing hook yanked into my mind**, pulling, tugging, dragging something raw and ugly to the surface?

Regret? No. I don't do regret.

Guilt? Maybe. But for what?

For not looking?

For staying put like a coward?

For knowing that if I had gone, I'd have found
exactly what I feared?

Or is it because **I'm still here and he's not?**

Now that **humiliation** I left behind.

Now that **abandon** I slept off.

That **breakup** I drank away.

That **pain**.

That **sorrow**.

That **wound, rip, cut, agony, fear...**

Why are they all **here now?**

They were **gone**. I made sure of it.

Drowned them in bottles, buried them under nights
too black to remember. Starved them of thought,
smothered them with indifference. They should be
dust. Ghosts with no voices.

So **what now?**

Why are they clawing back? Why do they fit into me
like they never left, like old scars splitting open in
the cold?

Was it Harry? Was it his absence?

Or was it always like this—was I just too drunk to
notice?

Why am I **afraid?**

Afraid of **what?**

Afraid... why am I afraid of **another breath?**

Another blink?

Another heartbeat?

Why do I want **none** of those anymore?

There's no gun to my head. No blade to my wrist.
No rope, no pills, no gas filling the room. Just me,

sitting here, body still working against my will, lungs
still dragging in air I don't want.

It's not fear of **death**. It's fear of **not dying**.

Fear that I'll keep waking up.

Fear that I'll keep remembering.

Fear that this doesn't end—

That there's no bottom to hit, just an endless, slow-
motion fall.

And **Harry's not here anymore**.

Maybe that's why.

I could swear I was happy.

I tell you, **I was**.

Just... **normal**. Nothing special, nothing tragic. Had
my ups and downs, like anyone else, but I carried
on. Got through the bad days, enjoyed the good
ones, let time do its thing.

So **what is this?**

Why are my **ups** so high now, burning bright, almost manic—like I can conquer the world, like life is bursting with possibility?

And why are my **downs** so low I want to erase the very concept of **existence** just to make them stop?

This isn't sadness. Sadness is **familiar**. I've known sadness. I've lived with it, drank with it, let it sleep in my bed.

This is something else. Something bigger. Something I don't know how to fight.

It feels like the ground beneath me has cracked, and I'm swinging between the sky and the abyss, never steady, never safe.

And I don't know which is worse—
The fall,
Or the moments I convince myself I'm flying.

Oh, **Harry**, where are you?

What is this?

This sudden **hilarity**, this rush of **ecstasy**, this absurd, giddy **lightness**—like I’ve just won something, like I’ve just been set free—

Only to step, mid-laugh, into a **swamp** of **pain and regret and shame** so thick it pulls me under.

Harry!

Harry, what is this??

Why does my mind **crack open** like this, spilling joy I don’t trust, followed by a darkness so deep I swear I’ll never see out of it?

Why does it feel like I’m **two people**, constantly switching—one soaring, the other drowning?

Harry, you knew. **You must’ve known.**

Did you leave because of this?

Or did this begin because **you left?**

Hey you...

Yes, **you**. The **normal man**. The one whose world still makes sense, whose feet still touch solid ground.

Come here.

Sit with me. **Drink with me.**

Don't worry—you can **nurse your one** while I **have five**. I'm not pushing. I don't care if you sip it slow, if you hate the taste, if you want to leave the second you sit down.

I just need... **a steady shoulder.**

For my hands.

Look.

They're **shaking.**

They never did this.

Not in fights, not in storms, not even in the worst of nights when I wanted to end everything and didn't. My hands were always **steady**.

And now—**look**.

I don't know what's happening.

I don't know what's coming next.

I just need a few minutes, a few drinks, a little borrowed stability—just enough to pretend, just for a while, that I'm not **falling apart**.

What do you mean you don't know me?

I know you.

You're **everywhere**—laughing at television, having normal friends, hosting dinner parties, chatting in elevators, joining colleagues at the coffee machine.

Yes, **just like me**.

...No.

Not like me?

No... not.

I—I can't do that. **Not now.**

Not now that Harry is gone.

I can't talk to people.

I can't **do** things properly.

I can't... **look, you're leaving too.**

You can't stand me.

I **frighten** you.

I **never** did...

Harry, what is this?

I don't want this...

Harry, I don't want this...

Why do I feel **pain**?

Why do I feel **anguish**?

Harry?

Harry, I don't want this...

I don't want to feel like my insides are twisting.

I don't want to feel like my own skin doesn't fit.

I don't want this **flood** in my chest, this pressure in my throat, this burning in my eyes like something is trying to claw its way out of me.

Harry, make it stop.

Please.

I don't know what this is.

I don't know how to fight it.

You were supposed to teach me, Harry. You were supposed to know.

But you're not here anymore.

And I don't know what to do.

A quiet descent into despair, memory, and unbearable, lucid kindness.

Harry had fourteen meticulously planned ways to die.
He chose none of them.
Instead, he drank.

This is not a redemption story.
This is the story of a man who understood pain better
than hope, who offered kindness not out of love, but
as revenge against life itself. A man who knew every
contour of despair, every lie in a motivational poster,
every joke that hides a scream.

When Harry vanishes, what's left behind isn't grief—
it's infection. A slow rot that spreads through the
narrator's mind, cracking memory, time, and self.
What begins as sorrow twists into something far
worse: understanding.

HARRY is a descent without glamour, a confession
without salvation, a scream into the void that doesn't
ask for an echo.

You won't feel better after reading it.
But you might feel *less alone*.